

Sunday 11th July 2021

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.
God is ever present, around us and within us,
though separate let us worship together in God.

Suggested hymn Lord of creation to you be all praise
Listen [here](#)

Prayer

Creator God, source of all being, the world is your creation, and all life is part of your creation, we are bound within the fabric of creation, one with all that is and one with you.

Creation is living, evolving, water and land sustain life, the air a wonderful balance of the elements needed for life, but we are careless of the earth and affect its balance.

Your love is unconditional and universal, and all people receive your love and your forgiveness, all are part of creation, when we hurt creation, we hurt ourselves and each other. Creator God we pray for wisdom and knowledge in our decision making, and for compassionate hearts in the way we live.

The glory of creation speaks of love, we glimpse this glory in the beauty and wonder of nature, in the discoveries which have helped us evolve and become more aware and more careful of our place in creation. We glimpse the glory of creation in the diversity of life and the intricate web of interdependency, in the balance of seasons and the beauty of sun on rain, a combination which we see in rainbows, and recognise as a symbol of your love.

Creator God, we praise you, lifting our hearts and voices in a song of thankfulness and offering our love to you and each other in response.

Lord's Prayer

Reading 2 Samuel 6: 1-5 & 10-19 (taken from The Living Bible)

Suggested hymn Sing of the Lord's goodness
Listen [here](#)

Thought

The books of Samuel are known as historical books in the Biblical tradition, although within the Judaic tradition they are also part of the Law. They tell a major part of the story of Israel, and in particular the story of David. David's story is complex, anointed as a boy he did not become King until the death of Saul and by then he had married Saul's daughter Michal. There were many battles during this period of Israel's history and the Ark of the Covenant, which had been carried through the wilderness, had been taken by the Philistines. It was later returned to Israel and in our passage today we hear of its coming to Jerusalem.

The Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of God's presence, and a symbol of the shared faith of the twelve tribes. After a long period of exile and the division of the tribes into North and South territories, David succeeded in re-uniting the tribes and was appointed King. One of his first acts was to announce a new capital for the new Kingdom and he chose Jerusalem. In our reading David is bringing the Ark of the Covenant to the new capital. It is a joyous occasion and as I read this passage, I could not help but compare the scene depicted to the scenes of anticipation and celebration as England play in the Euros, we have witnessed a lot of singing and dancing.

Another comparison came to mind when I read of Michal's disdain of David. We are intended to link this to his exuberant dancing in rather skimpy clothing, in front of many young servant girls, and certainly it was probably inappropriate. However, I suspect it was not the main cause of Michal's demeanour. She had fallen in love with the young David, who are told previously was a very handsome young man, and she had married him, but they remained childless, and this caused her grief and anxiety. David would need an heir and with the death of Saul this childlessness bestowed

more power to David as any future children would have no relationship to the line of Saul. This must have made Michal fear for her future and fear so often drives us to anger and antagonism.

As I read this, I was reminded of two things. Firstly, the story of the Prodigal Son's elder brother who resented the attention given to his brother's return, secondly this led to a comparison between cats and dogs. When we have been away for a few days, on our return the dogs go nuts, they are waiting for the door to open, having recognised the sound of the car, and they just do not know who to go to first. There is much tail wagging as they rush between us, greeting us like prodigals returned. In comparison the cat sits very aloof, the picture of resentment that we dared to go away and can hold a grudge for days. The dogs and the cat, the Father and the elder brother.

Holding a grudge only ever hurts the one doing the holding, love lets go and welcomes regardless. Michal's actions show that her relationship with David was being hurt by her own fears which were influencing how she responded to David. Jesus told the story of the Prodigal Son to remind us of the effusive love of God which holds no grudges, and to encourage us to let go of anything that stops us loving in the same way.

Reading Mark 6:14-29

Suggested Song Forgiveness by Matthew West

Watch [here](#)

Reflection

In Mark we are confronted by a similar situation as in Samuel, a woman holding a grudge. Early on in Mark we are told of the death of John the Baptist but given no other information. Here in a story which sits between a section of parables and miracles and the feeding of the five thousand we are given the full story of his death. It is a story that many may be familiar with through the medium of film and the dancing of Salome in her seven veils, but the reality is much more complex than a simple reading might suggest.

Herod Antipas, featured in this story, was the son of Herod the Great and was a minor ruler, possibly a prince. That much is certain, however the rest of the family tree is less certain and would make a good story for 'Who do you think you are?' Herodias we are told is married to Herod Antipas, but she is not his first wife, and he is not her first husband, she was we are told married to his brother Philip but both Herod and Herodias divorced in order to marry which was where John the Baptist came in. He was quite outspoken about this relationship, drawing much attention to it being 'outside the law' and not proper. The situation is even more complicated when we factor in that Herodias was probably a niece of Herod the Great and therefore a cousin of both Philip and Herod Antipas. It is thought that Salome may have been her daughter from her marriage to Philip.

Now, we are told that Herodias wants John assassinated for his outspoken criticism of her relationships, but Herod is very aware that John is well thought of and has quite a following so instead he has John arrested. In fact, Herod is fascinated by John's stories and enjoys listening even though we are told he does not understand what he is hearing. Then comes the night of the party with much music, dancing, and imbibing. Herodias' daughter comes to entertain, but we are told she is called Herodias so this may not be Salome but another daughter, perhaps from the second marriage. Herod, perhaps wanting to impress his guests, offers a reward for her dancing – he grants her a wish and she is unsure what to ask for so goes to ask the advice of her mother. Bingo! The opportunity Herodias, the wife, has been waiting for, she tells her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist, on a platter. What can Herod do, he does not want to refuse and lose face in front of his guests but equally he fears the consequences of killing John.

On the evidence of this story, we are invited to see Herodias as a spoilt, ruthless woman who abuses her husband's power and we are reminded of other Hebrew stories where this happens, Potiphar's wife and Jezebel to name two instances, but we have only this one reference to Herodias, and this is inserted to explain the death of John the Baptist. Should we condemn her on such flimsy evidence? What might Jesus have said?

Jesus encouraged women, he treated them as equals when society and religion treated them as inferior. Jesus listened to women. What was Herodias' life really like? Her marriage was certainly the

‘talk of the steamy’ and probably also the ‘talk of court coffee mornings’ I wonder if anyone listened to her side of the story, what were her marriages really like, she certainly came from a seemingly dysfunctional family? Was she lonely, did she have anyone to confide in, someone who might challenge her ongoing attitude to John?

Imagine for a moment –

The sun shone through the window as another day dawned, its rays glancing off the precious metals adorning the room. Disturbed she opens her eyes, and for a moment she was a free spirit bouncing around the room like the light from the sun, light as a fairy, then she remembered, and all so soon she was back on earth, imprisoned by thoughts that would never leave her alone.

They were all talking about her, oh not to her face, but she knew, she was aware of the sudden silences when she entered a room, the guilty looks when she disturbed the servant girls. She was not invited to social gatherings as she had once been and it was all his fault, that man.

How dare he accuse them, what did he really know of her marriage, mistakes happen. When she met Herod, she knew she had made a mistake, but she had not reckoned on him getting rid of his wife and turning to her, but he had and now that man was accusing her of scheming and planning it all. It was not fair and now she had nothing to do all day except think, as usual.

She had thought it would be different this time, she had thought Herod was different, that they would be a partnership, but no, he never asked her opinion, he did not include her, and she rarely even saw him. She was so lonely. Still, there was the party to look forward to and one of the dancers knew her daughter, maybe there would be a chance of company and conversation. If things did not change, she would go mad.

She got up and another day rolled on.

We believe God loves us and forgives us and in response we are encouraged to love others and to forgive others. Gossip is not loving and yet we can all find ourselves speculating about the actions of others, and then sharing our speculations as if they were the truth. Jesus showed no discrimination, he accepted people as they were, he talked to them and he shared his message of God’s love, he sowed seeds of love and then left them to grow, he left people to change in their own time as the light of love illuminated their actions. I wonder if Herodius would have acted differently if she had met Jesus, if she had found someone to listen to her and reflect back a different way. I wonder if John was righteous and loving, or was he pious and did his actions sometimes stray away from the message of Jesus?

God is love, and the message of Jesus is about understanding this love.

Human love is often about seeking out those with whom we have something in common, those we are attracted to, but God’s love is about loving others for who they are, seeing them as individuals created in the image of God and letting them grow into their created being. God’s love is nurture and encouragement, it contains no jealousy or envy, no sense of ownership but is about freedom. God’s love serves with no expectation of return but delights when there is a response. God’s love does not stand on dignity but overflows as exuberantly as a dog’s welcome, delighting in the moment and letting go of past wrongs.

We know we are on the path to the kingdom when we live carefully and take care; love one another and care for one another; learn from one another; are faithful to each other and honest with each other. When we take time to listen to each other and encourage one another to act in God’s love.

Suggested Hymn

Make me a channel of your peace

Listen [here](#)

Prayers

Loving God we come to you in prayer, opening our hearts and minds to the whisper of your love. As we reflect on the stories we have shared we also reflect on our own decisions and choices. Where these have been less than loving we confess our need for the forgiveness of others. May your love lead to a change of heart and changes in our behaviour and attitudes, as we seek to follow the way of Jesus.

Creator God may we connect with your love and allow it to move us on the way.

Everyday we face new challenges which encourage us to think of you and remind us that there is a choice. In our daily lives may we be mindful of the decisions we make, choosing the loving option and reaching out to others in a way that reflects Jesus to the world.

Creator God may we connect with your love and allow it to move us on the way.

As we share together, we bring to you our churches and the fellowship of which we are a part. We lift to you those who are grieving, those who are caring for elderly and frail relatives, those who fear for their employment and all who face challenges which bring hard decisions. May we be there to listen, and to love in creative ways. Wherever they are on their journey may they sense your presence with them.

Creator God may we connect with your love and allow it to move us on the way.

We lift to you our communities and their decision makers, our nation and government. There are difficult decisions to be made and often we do not understand the decisions that are taken. We pray for your Spirit, which binds us all together, to guide the decisions that will affect everyone as we move forward in our relationship with Covid. May we each exercise our duty for care for one another, taking appropriate actions as we explore meeting together in new ways and recognising each other's choices as we assess our individual risk.

Creator God may we connect with your love and allow it to move us on the way.

We pray for the world, a world we discover through the news and through relationships. We lift to you those who live in vastly different circumstances from ourselves, people who live remotely, away from medical care and yet are facing many more difficulties, people who live without the certainty of employment or shelter. May we seek to influence the decisions which will bring aid to the poor and hungry, may we campaign for a fair distribution of vaccines to those countries who have no financial access to medicine, and may we always remember the message of Jesus to share what we have with those who have not.

Creator God may we connect with your love and allow it to move us on the way.

We pause to each lift to you our families and friends, the people we know well and with whom we share love and who support us, as we support them.

Creator God may we connect with your love and allow it to move us on the way.

In Jesus name. Amen

Offertory

As we worship together, we pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church through our continued offering and by exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know your blessing on all we do. Amen

Suggested song Help us accept each other

Tune Acceptance

Listen [here](#)

Blessing

May the blessing that is the knowledge of God, source of all being, the love of God discovered through Jesus and the inspiration of the Spirit which binds us together be with us on our journey this day and every day. Amen.